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NSF grant opens gateway to vast computing resources

By Mary Catt | July 27, 2009

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A new National Science Foundation grant awarded to two ILR School researchers will create a Social Science Gateway to TeraGrid -- the NSF's national supercomputing infrastructure.

John Abowd, the Edmund Ezra Day Professor of Industrial and Labor Relations, and Lars Vilhuber, an economist and ILR School senior research associate, said the gateway will unlock enormous amounts of social sciences data on people, jobs and firms. Researchers will be able to access the gateway from their own workstations.

"Research strategies such as very large-scale resampling and synthesis, which were previously proposed but not technically feasible, will be implemented," Abowd and Vilhuber said in their proposal. "The expected explosion of use will lead to new results in a multitude of social sciences."

The TeraGrid's potential for social scientists will be expanded through the

Social Science Gateway, they said, adding that their long-term goal is to put together the tools needed for social scientists to more easily access large-scale computational facilities.

A \$393,523 grant funds their work on the gateway and its maintenance through 2012. Based on the two researchers' prior work with the Virtual Research Data Center at Cornell, the gateway is expected to open later this year.

TeraGrid, the world's largest, most comprehensive distributed cyberinfrastructure for open scientific research, opened in 2001. Its resources include more than a petaflop (one million gigaflops) of computing capability and more than 30,000 terabytes of online and archival data storage, with rapid access and retrieval over high-performance networks. (The typical desktop computer has between 10 and 40 gigaflops). Researchers can also access more than 100 discipline-specific databases.

Information on the Social Science Gateway will appear on the Virtual Research Data Center Web site: <http://www.vrdc.cornell.edu> (<http://www.vrdc.cornell.edu>).

STORY CONTACTS

George Lowery

gpl5@cornell.edu (<mailto:gpl5@cornell.edu>)

607-255-2171 (tel:607-255-2171)

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CONTACT

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Ithaca, NY 14850
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